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The Caliph in a Sacred Guise Origins as Initiated by Abû Ja‘far al-Mansûr

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ABSTRACT

It was the second ‘Abbãsid Caliph Abû Ja‘far al-Mansûr, who was the first to formulate a complete, integrative ideological system about the sacredness of the caliphal institution and of the caliph himself. Unlike his predecessors, whether Rãshidis or Umayyads, whose caliphate had never been considered as a heavenly divine affair, Abu Ja‘far wanted his one to be pertaining to the realm of religion, and his person as a caliph to be surrounded by an aura of holiness. To this effect, he incorporated in his ideological system diverse elements that had never been put together before. Religion-like claims, concepts of a mythical nature and inherited ancient Arab traditions were combined together to incubate his theory about the caliphate. Although this was intended primarily to inhance his legitimacy in ruling and confronting his antagonists of the different colors and sects, this ideological system initiated by al-Mansûr found its way into some aspects of the political Islamic thought in which the caliphal institution has been by and large one of the religious terms and concepts that strongly echoes Abû Ja‘far's opinions.

Keywords: Caliph, Abû Ja‘far al-Mansûr, Sacredness, Abbãsid Caliphates.

Preliminary Notes

Long before the Shi‘ite doctrine on the sacredness of the imamate and the infallible (*ma‘sûm*) imãm was fully articulated at the hands of a chain of their jurisprudents starting from the fourth Hijri century[(1)], the second ‘Abbãsid caliph Abû Ja‘far al-Mansûr had initiated a system of ideas to inhance his legitimacy in ruling. His system did not differ in substance from the Shi‘ite doctrine that

(1) Prominent of these were Muhammad ibn Ya‘qûb al-Kulayni (d. 329/ 940) author of *al-Kãfi fi ‘Ilm al-Dîn*, ibn Bãbûya al-Qummi (d. 381/ 991) author of *Man Lã Yahduruhu al-Faqîh,* Abû Ja‘far al-Tûsi (d. 460/ 1076) author of *al-Tabyãn al-Jãmi‘ li ‘Ulûm al-Quran* and al-Fadl al-Tabarsi (d. 548/ 1153) author of *Majma‘ al-Bayãn fi Tafsîr al-Quran wa al-Furqãn.*

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developed in a later period, regardless of the difference in terminology used in the two cases. The system bestowed upon the office of caliph a religious sacredness deprived from its being a continuation of the prophethood and a complementary part of its mission. The caliph thus, and in this case al-Mansûr himself, was the inheritor of the Prophet's authorities, and in the same time was the one who had to complement his mission.

To be so, al-Mansûr was not in the office because he was his late brother caliph's nominee; rather, he deserved the caliphate as a grant from the Prophet according to an eternal will spelled out explicitly by the Prophet himself that states that there will emerge from the progeny of his uncle"Abbãs" the ones who will assume the caliphate, including al-Mansûr, textually designated by his epithet. In such a case, and in order to exactly fulfill the duty that this eternal will has assigned to him, al-Mansûr should be immune from errors, misconceives and deviation from the right path; he should be infallible. That was possible because in this ideological system the caliph represented the absolute authority of God in His earth, and in this capacity he was executing His unerring will. It was also possible because al-Mansûr himself possessed an eternally old knowledge, written down in a book that he has inherited from his ancestors, containing every thing he wanted to know whether in the past or in the future. This knowledge was good for him to guide his steps to the right direction.

This system of ideas that will be discussed in detail in the present paper caused a radical change in the formal understanding of the caliphate as has developed throughout the regin of the Rãshidis and the Umayyads. The innovativeness in this could be noticed in the fact that it was the first time ever for the principle of the divine right to rule to be introduced formally into the political Islamic culture. The caliphate in this sense turned to be a heavenly affair rather than worldly as it was thought of and indeed exercised by the previous caliphs. That is, regardless of the different, particular ways through which the four Rãshidis were elevated to the office of caliph, one thing common among them all was that they were the choice of some influential personalities[(2)]. These have never deemed them as having heavenly granted qualities that made them deserve the office; they rather found them entitled to rule

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(2) The gathering in what was known as *Saqîfat Bani Sã'ida* (the roofed gallery of Bani Sa'ida) which resulted in choosing Abû Bakr to the office of caliph is a good example for the role played by the influential personalities in elevating to the office the one from their choice. Abû Bakr was recommended to the office firstly by 'Umar ibn al-Khattab and then this was approved by the others (with the exception of Sa'd ibn 'Ubãda) who gave him their oath of allegiance in what has to be known as *al-bay'a al-khãssa*. In another example, 'Umar was the choice of Abû Bakr with the consultation of his "inner circle" while he was on his death bed. The counselors were the important of men such as 'Abd al-Rahmãn ibn 'Awf and 'Uthmãn ibn 'Affãn. In a third example, 'Uthmãn was the choice of the six-member council of consultation (*al-Shûra*) appointed by 'Umar, and none of the six was but a prominent figure in the then - political society.

only on grounds of their personal (human) qualifications[(3)]. Moreover, when in office, the status of caliph and his relations with his subordinates seemed in many respects as of a *primus inter pares*. He had the mandate to rule, but he had no delusions about the restrictions on his powers that might be imposed by the high-ranking *sahãba* (the Prophet's companions) around him. Being so, the caliph could not claim that his exercise of power was right because he was divinely guided; he, as any other man, was not immune from committing mistakes, and for that reason he was exposed to criticism[(4)], and even more to violent opposition by some sectors of the political society.

The Umayyads arrival to the office of caliph was equally worldly. The founder of the dynasty, Mu‘ãwiya ibn Abi Sufyãn, could secure the caliphate to himself only by resorting to the sword. When in office, he used all the means at his disposal, whatever they were, to gain the approval of the different political activists of his time on his sovereignty. In the same time, he re-united the community under his sway after it had been split into various conflicting parties during the civil war (*al-fitna*) triggered off by the assassination of the third Rãshidi caliph ‘Uthmãn ibn ‘Affãn. This led eventually to the theory of consensus (*ijmã‘*) that the Umayyads used to legitimize their authority; that is, they deserved the caliphate because they were there according to a general agreement reached to by the whole Islamic community[5]. In addition, in order to confine the right to the caliphate within the

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(3) Many examples could be referred to here to give credit to the idea that the Rãshidi caliphs were elevated to the office in light of their personal merits. In the meeting at al-Madina mosque in which the Muslims gave their general oath of allegiance (*al-bay‘a al-‘ãmma*) to Abû Bakr, one day after *al-bay‘a al-khãssa* in the *saqîfa*, Umar inaugurated the meeting by a speech in which he referred to what he had said about his recommending Abû Bakr to the office, confirming that "my discourse yesterday was only my own idea; neither it was in the Book of God, nor it was a pledge the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God be upon Him) had conveyed unto me". Abû Bakr, in his words, "is the best one among you; he is the Prophet's companion and the second of the two who were in the cave", in reference to the Prophet and Abû Bakr who migrated together from Mecca to al-Madina, and were to hide in a cave for three days. For the full text of Umar's speech, see: Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulûk* (History of the Messengers and the Kings), 6 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat Izz-al-Din, 1985), Vol. II, p. 105. In another example, it is related that during the upheaval in the last days of Caliph ‘Uthmãn, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khattãb has said, "After the Messenger of God had passed away, the Muslims looked at the best one of them and made him caliph; and that was Abû Bakr. Then when Abû Bakr had passed away, the Muslims looked at the best one of them and made him caliph; and that was ‘Umar. Then when ‘Umar had passed away, the Muslims looked at the best one of them and made him caliph; and that was ‘Uthman. Now, if you murdered him, bring us the one who is better than him"; Ahmad ibn Hanbal al-Sahybani, *Fadã’il al Sahãba* (*The Merits of the Companions*), ed. Wasiyy-Allah Muhammad ‘Abbãs (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risãla, 1983), Part I, p. 297.

(4) After he had been confirmed in the office through *al-bay‘a al-‘ãmma*, Abu Bakr delivered a speech in which he gave full powers to the Muslims to assist him whenever he acts well, and to bring him to the right path if he commits any mistake. See the full text of the speech in: Tabari, *Tãrîkh*, Vol. II, p. 105.

(5) It should be noticed that the theory of consensus was the main tool which Mu‘ãwiya ibn Abi Sufyãn has

limits of his own clan, Mu‘ãwiya revived the ancient Arab system of dynastic transmission of authority(6). He chose his son Yazïd as heir to the throne, which became a precedent that his successors were to follow.

To conclude, one ventures to say that down to the ‘Abbãsis' arrival(7) to power, the caliphal institution seemed in many respects to have been temporal, or maybe better to say secular, with no divine origins. It was an affair related to the earthly life and politics of the people, while the caliph himself was confirmed in the seat because he has been believed to enjoy certain personal merits (but not any sacred excellency) that qualified him to rule; or as was the case of the Umayyads, he was his predecessor's candidate. The theory articulated by al-Mansûr on his caliphate and legitimacy was totally different.

Genesis of Legitimacy

It was in about 100 AH (718 AD) that the ‘Abbãsis were approached for the first time to see the possibility of having one of them to be an *imãm*, better to be interpreted in this context as the supreme political figure of the Islamic community. That was in a meeting held in Humayma (now in south modern Jordan) between Muhammad bin ‘Ali, a descendant of ‘Abbãs ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, and Bukayr ibn Mãhãn, a resourceful *mawlã* (non-Arab Muslim) political activist residing then in

used to defend his assuming the office of caliph. Designating the year 41 AH (in which al-Hasan ibn Ali abdicated himself from the caliphate) as the Year of Consensus *(‘ãm al-jamã‘a*) is a good indication to this fact. Nonetheless, it is equally right to say that there developed under the Umayyads some ideas that claimed that the caliphate was bestowed upon them by God and they deserved the office because this was predetermined by God Himself. These ideas were reflected in the verses of the court poets and were fully articulated in the epistle which Caliph al-Walîd ibn Yazîd has written in 125 AH (743 Ad) to declare his two sons as heirs to the throne. See the full text of the epistle in: Tabari, *Tarikh*, Vol. IV, pp. 111-113. Some modern scholars, however, found close relation between these ideas and those of the *Jabriyya* (predestinarians) that they described the Umayyads as Jabriyya in their theory on legitimacy. See for example: Husein Atwan, *Al-Umawiyyûn wa al-Khilafa* (Dar al-Jalil, 1968), pp. 19-47; W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh University Press, 1987), pp. 26-27.

(6) The dynastic transmission of authority was more familiar in south Arabia (Yemen) than it was in the north. This could be noticed in Kinda in which the "king" used to bequeath the authority to his son; see the names of the five kings of Kinda in: ibn Sa‘îd al-Andalusi, *Nashwat al-Tarab fi Tãrîkh Jãhiliyyat al-‘Arab,* ed. Nasrat Abd al-Rahman (Amman: Maktabat al-Aqsa, 1982), Part I, pp. 244-248. The same rule applied to the Ghassanids of al-Sham and the Lakhmites of al-Hira (who were however from southern origins) whose kings inherited their authorities from their fathers; see the names of the Ghassanid kings in *ibid,* pp. 199-208, and those of the Lakhmites in: *ibid*, pp. 269-285.

(7) In this article, ‘Abbãsis (sing. ‘Abbãsi) is used to identify the persons descending from ‘Abbãs ibn ‘Abd-al-Muttalib, while ‘Abbãsid is used as an adjective to any of the institutions affiliated to the ‘Abbãsis.

Khurasan. In the meeting, the two men concluded an agreement stipulating that Bukayr would establish in Khurasan a movement that would strive to bring the imamate to Muhammad bin ‘Ali, on condition that his name should be kept secret, obviously to avoid any troubles with the Umayyad authority. Instead, the movement would hail as *imãm* the one acceptable from the House of the Prophet (*al-ridã min Ãl al-Bayt* or *Ãl Muhammad*);(8) and that was the first time in the Islamic history that such a motto was brought into the political literature of the period.

Ãl Muhammad, or the family of the Prophet, was not a term of consensus at the time. The narrowest meaning of the term was that adhered to by the descendants of ‘Ali bin Abi Tãlib (the fourth Rãshidi caliph) from his wife Fãtima, the Prophet's daughter. That is to say that the "family" was restricted to the offspring of the Prophet. A wider circle than this was to include any descendant of ‘Ali whether he was from Fãtima or from any other wife. Others included all the progeny of Abû Tãlib, the Prophet's paternal uncle, starting with ‘Ali and his brothers (especially Ja‘far). Yet, the Islamic culture accepted also an expanded meaning of the term, which was identified as Banû Hãshim or Hãshimiyyûn, and shortened usually as Hãshim. The term was meant to indicate all the descendants of Hãshim the great grand father of the Prophet. In such an expanded meaning, the ‘Abbãsis, the children of ‘Abbãs, the Prophet's paternal uncle, occupied their place perfectly within the family (*Ãl*) of the Prophet.

The first *ridã min Ãl Muhammad* was not destined however to be elevated to the high office of caliph. He died in 124 AH (742 AD), bequeathing the imamate to his son Ibrãhîm. The son was not luckier than the father was. When the movement in Khurasan turned to arms in its conflict with the last Umayyad caliph Marwãn II (starting from Ramadan 129/ 747 AD), the name of Ibrãhîm was disclosed as he himself was the one meant by *al-ridã*. Consequently, Marwãn's agents captured him and transferred him from al-Humayma to Harrãn, the then center of Marwãn, where he died, most probably poisoned, in the caliph's prison. Nevertheless, the movement did succeed in bringing the office to its third candidate when Ibrãhîm's brother, Abû al-‘Abbãs (nicknamed al-Saffãh), was proclaimed caliph in Kûfa in Rabi‘ I 131 (749 AD). Not long after this event, Marwãn II was murdered in Egypt where he sought a refuge.

During this long struggle, which lasted for more than thirty years, the main ideas that the movement in Khurasan was preaching were that the Umayyads were tyrants who usurped the caliphate from the relatives of the Prophet who, because of this relationship, were more entitled to it,

(8) The most reliable source on this meeting is *Akhbãr al-Dawla al- ‘Abbãsiyya wa fihi Akhbãr al-‘Abbãs wa Wuldih* (Affairs of the ‘Abbasid Cause Containing the Affairs of ‘Abbas and his Descendents), written in the 3rd/ 9th century by an unknown author, ed. Abd-al-Aziz al- Duri and Abd-al-Jabbar al-Muttalibi (Beirut: al-Tali‘a Publishing Co., 1971), pp.198-200. The book surpasses all the other sources for the detailed information it makes available about the movement initiated in Khurasan in the name of the ‘Abbãsis.

thus the office should be restored to them. Such a discourse was fair enough for the ‘Abbãsis as well as for their supporters at the time of the revolution against the Umayyads as it legitimizes their aspiration to see an ‘Abbãsi in the office of caliph; their candidate belonged to the House of the Prophet, and he gained acceptance (*ridã*) and approval of the community.

Albeit such ideas served the ‘Abbãsis to come to power, they could not be relied upon to justify their exclusive claims to rule apart from the other branches of the House who were by the same standards not less entitled to this right. In other words, they were in need to a more specific theory that grants legitimacy to their being caliphs *vis-à-vis* any claim that might arise from the other branches of the House.

Such a concern was expressed loudly for the first time during al- Saffãh's inauguration ceremony in Kûfa where he and his uncle Dãwûd ibn ‘Ali delivered two speeches which revolved mainly around their legitimacy to rule(9). Both of them did not abandon the very idea on the right of *Ãl* Muhammad in general to be successors to the Prophet. They boasted of their kinship to him, and Dãwûd made it clear that the Banû Hûshim have lastly had the caliph from within their ranks. Yet, they also exhibited an unmistakable tendency to give the ‘Abbãsis a special status among the family of the Prophet. The term "our right" which occurred frequently in the two speeches was intended to mean exclusively the right of the ‘Abbãsis rather than the right of the family in general. The ‘Abbãsis by this argument have acquired the right to rule not only by virtue of their being the Prophet's heirs, but also they deserved it for their taking the initiative to restore the right to his family.

Coupled with this tendency was a trend that was still in embryo at this early stage to imbue the right to caliphate, hence its holder, with a religious color. Citing several Quranic verses referring to the Prophet's kinsmen, al-Saffãh underlined in his speech the sacred status enjoyed by these, attributing to them special religious qualities that were textually confirmed by God Himself. Accordingly, the ‘Abbãsis were qualified to "the mastership, to manipulating the public affairs and to the caliphate" because, in his words,

> *"…it is by us that God has showed the people the right course after they had been deluded, made them understand after their ignorance and saved them out of their annihilation. In addition, it is by us that He revealed the truth, defeated the falsehoods and mended what the people had done wrong".*

(9) See the texts in: al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh* I: 214-15; Izz-al-Din ibn al-Athir, *al-Kãmil fi al-Tãrîkh* (The Complete History), 13 vols., ed. Carlos Juhannes Turnberg (Brill, 1871, Photostat edition, Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1979), V: 411-416.

Legitimacy in Question

The theory on the ‘Abbãsid legitimacy was not, however, to be produced in its complete shape during al-Saffâh's short term of office during which the ‘Abbãsis' main occupation was to eliminate the remnants of the old order rather than to establish a distinctive one. It was under the rule of his brother and successor Abû Ja‘far (later on al-Mansûr) that the foundations of the new regime were laid down and the main articles of its ideational framework were worked out. During his reign which lasted more than twenty years, Abû Ja‘far had to face three problems, which, if not solved, the whole ‘Abbãsid enterprise would be nipped in the bud. The most dangerous of which was the emergence of the ‘Alids (descendants of ‘Ali bin Abi Tãlib) on the political scene as powerful claimants to the caliphate. The negative stand of many of the piety- minded *fuqahã‘* (scholars) towards his rule was not less problematic. Finally, the question of power succession caused much trouble to the caliph. When put together, these three problems were in fact the incubator in which Abû Ja‘far has raised his own theory for legitimating his rule.

The ‘Alids expressed their rejection of the ‘Abbãsis' claims that they represented the House of the Prophet through the revolt in 145 AH / 762 AD of Muhammad bin al-Hasan (known as al-Nafs al-Zakiyya = Pure Soul) in Hijaz and his brother Ibrãhîm in Basra. The revolt did not only defy the authority of Abu Ja‘far, but more importantly, it challenged the very authenticity of the ‘Abbãsis from which they derived their identification with the House of the Prophet. Their claims that they have been in power in the name of the House were now shattered. In addition, the semi-messianic nature of the revolt, which hailed al-Nafs al-Zakiyya as a *mahdi* (a divinely guided *imãm*), threw much doubt on their credibility and they appeared as usurpers of the right of the most important branch of the House, namely the children of the Prophet. Moreover, the way Abû Ja‘far suppressed the revolt, whereby many of the ‘Alids were killed in the battlefield or were put to death in prison,(10) was an additional reason for questioning the claims of the ‘Abbãsis that their mission was to safeguard the interests and the legitimate rights of the House.

What made things more critical was the attitude of several piety-minded scholars towards the new regime. During the reign of al-Sãffah, these seemed to have taken a passive stand on the ‘Abbãsid project. There is no evidence, whatsoever, that any of them had expressed an opinion on the caliph. They were seemingly in a wait-and-watch position, waiting perhaps for what might come out of the revolution which raised the ‘Abbãsis to the throne and if these would keep to its principles. The main one of these was included in the oath of allegiance (*al-bay‘a*) which the partisans were asked to give

(10) Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqãtil al-Talibiyyîn* (Killings of the Talibids), ed. al-Sayyid Ahmad Saqr (Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifa, nd), pp.179-399, wrote biographies of not less than seventeen ‘Alids who were killed during the reign of al-Mansûr.

to their superiors in the movement. They had to spell out their adherence to "the book of God and the sayings and practices of the Prophet, to work in line with what is right and just, to defend the weak against any injustice and to take away the right from the mighty".[11] The silence period of the scholars ended however by the coming of Abû Ja‘far to the office. In their eyes, the image of the second ‘Abbãsid caliph was of a tyrant who did not differ a bit from his Umayyad predecessors. Abd al-Rahmãn ibn Ziyãd ibn An‘am, a judge (*qãdi*) in Ifriqiya who served Marwãn II and the first two ‘Abbãsid caliphs, made this fact clear when he reportedly left Ifriqiya heading to Baghdad to convey to the caliph a complaint submitted by the people there against their oppressive governors. After a long stay at the door of the caliph awaiting a permission of audience, he met Abû Ja‘far to slam him saying, "Oppression has spread all over our country, and I came here to let you know about it. But surprisingly, I found that oppression is coming out of your door". The *qãdi* went further to make a comparison between the Umayyad rule and that of Abû Ja‘far:

> *"I witnessed injustice and overwhelming repression that I speculated to be so because these countries were far away from you. But the nearer I came to you, the greater they became. By God, tyranny and injustice which I had seen under their [the Umayyads'] rule are not different from what I see under your rule"*.[12]

A prominent Mu‘tazilite scholar made the same comparison. Bashîr al-Rahhãl, who joined the revolt of the ‘Alid Ibrãhîm ibn al-Hasan, delivered a speech to a wide audience in Basra, part of which was addressed to Abû Ja‘far:

> *"It was you [Abû Ja‘far] who said yesterday if we come into power, we will do justice. You are now in power. So what kind of justice have you demonstrated, and what oppression have you removed, and what oppressed have you treated with justice? This night is very similar to the day that has gone"*.[13]

The negative attitudes of the scholars towards Abû Ja‘far led Abû Hanîfa, master of one of the four sunni jurisprudence schools, to advocate loudly the revolt of Ibrãhîm in Basra, and was reported to have issued a legal opinion (*fatwã*) that joining the revolt was better for the Muslim than facing the external enemies at the border strongholds.[14] Mãlik ibn Anas, another master of one of these schools, issued also in Medina, his place of residence, a *fatwã* that licensed the Muslim community to join al-

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(11) *Akhbãr al-Dawla*, 292.

(12) The report on this meeting is preserved with slightly different details by: al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tãrîkh Baghdad* (History of Baghdad), 14 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitãb al-Lubnãni, nd), X: 215; Yaqût al-Hamawi, *Mu‘jam al-Buldãn* (A Dictionary of the Countries), 5 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1977), I: 231; Jalãl al-Dîn al- Suyûti, *Tarîkh al- Khulafã’* (History of the Caliphs), ed. Muhammad Muhyi al-Dîn ‘Abd-al-Hamîd (nd, np), p. 268.

(13) al-Isfahãni, *Maqãtil*, p. 341.

(14) al- Khatîb, *Tãrîkh Baghdad*, XIII: 386.

Nafs al-Zakiyya in his revolt. He at the same time absolved the Muslims from any commitment to the oath of allegiance they had sworn to the ‘Abbãsid rulers on grounds that this oath had been taken from them by force, while any oath taken under compulsion was considered void.(15)

To tame the scholars, Abû Ja‘far appealed to violence that embraced many of them. Abû Hanîfa was ordered by the caliph to be flogged by the pretext that he refused to accept the office of *qãdi*, and was thrown in jail where he died, in 150 AH /767 AD, most probably poisoned at the orders of the caliph(16). Mãlik ibn Anas had to pay also for his thoughts of the caliph. In 147 AH / 764 AD, the governor of Medina and the caliph's cousin, Ja‘far ibn Sulaymãn, flogged him and had his shoulder dislocated.(17) Two other scholars had also suffered the experience of prison. Abu Ja‘far instructed his governor of Mecca to arrest Sufyãn al-Thawri and ‘Abbãd ibn Khathîr and at the same time ordered the carpenters to prepare their tools to crucify them. The caliph seemed to have wanted to enjoy the spectacle while he was performing his pilgrimage. However, it happened that he died en route to Mecca in 158 AH / 775 AD and Sufyãn and ‘Abbãd were lucky enough to escape this horrible fate.(18)

The third problem that Abû Ja‘far had to solve was that of the succession order. Shortly before his death, al-Saffãh ordained in a written document that his brother Abû Ja‘far would succeed him as caliph, and after him would come his nephew ‘Isã ibn Mûsã.(19) The kind of legitimacy Abû Ja‘far got from this nomination was well established in the Islamic political culture that accepted the principle of the right of a caliph to designate at his own discretion any of his kinsfolk to be his successor (as has been the case in the Umayyad caliphate). Nevertheless, the measure was opposed by some of the most prominent figures of the ‘Abbãsid house who understood the right to the caliphate in a different way. The ‘Abbãsis in general considered the caliphate as a family affair and a right to the dynasty as a whole rather than an individual prerogative. Thus, the mostly eligible to the office of caliph was the one of the family who contributed most to its cause and to diverting the caliphate to be its own property.

This understanding was attested by the insurrection of the caliph's uncle Abdullah ibn ‘Ali (supported by his brother ‘Abd al-Samad and gaining sympathy from another brother, Sulaymãn). Soon after Abû Ja‘far had assumed the office, Abdullah, then in Syria that was under his administration, refused to pay homage to him and proclaimed himself a caliph. His plea was what he

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(15) al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 281; ibn al-Athîr, *al-Kãamil*, V: 532; al-Suyûti, *Tãrîkh al-Khulafã’*, p. 261.

(16) Ahmad ibn Khallikãn, *Wafayãt al-A‘yãn wa Anbã’ Abnã’ al-Zamãn* (Deaths of the Dignitaries and Affairs of the Notables of their Times), 8 vols., ed. Ihsan ‘Abbas (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1968), V: 406; al-Kahtîb, *Tãrîkh Baghdad*, XIII: 328, 330; al-Suyûti, p. 259; al-Isfahãni, *Maqãtil*, p. 465.

(17) ibn Khallikãn, *Wafayãt*, IV: 137.

(18) Reports on the event are related in different ways and details by: al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 355; al-Suyûti, *Tãrîkh al-Khulafã’*, 262; al-Khatîb, *Tãrîkh Baghdad*, IX: 150.

(19) al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 236.

declared to his leading supporters in Syria on an alleged pledge that al-Saffãh had made, that the caliphate after him would go to whoever would rise to fight Marwãn II.[20] It was he, however, who shouldered the responsibility to combat bravely the last Umayyad caliph and to drive him out of al-Jazîra and al-Shãm provinces after the decisive battle of al-Zãb, and it was according to his guidance and with his support that his brother Sãlih ibn ‘Ali chased the ill-fated caliph to Egypt where he was killed.[21] Being so, the alleged pledge of al-Saffãh should apply perfectly and solely to him for his unique achievement in transforming the caliphate from the Umayyads to his own house.

Legitimizing his right to the caliphate in this way, Abdullah was seemingly not oblivious to the strong position of Abû Ja‘far who had in hand al-Saffãh's written testament that legalized his assuming the office. This pushed him in his endeavors to consolidate his coveted legitimacy to add a messianic touch to it. For this purpose, traditions dated from times prior to the coming of the ‘Abbãsis to power were produced to prophecy the role that Abdullah had played in the events that eventuated in the collapse of the Umayyad regime. Curiously enough, and perhaps to give them credence, these traditions were put in the mouth of prominent Umayyad figures.

One of them was attributed to Maslama, son of the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik and an outstanding military commander under several Umayyad caliphs, warning his brother caliph Hishãm that the liquidation of the Umayyad House will be at the hands of Abdullah ibn ‘Ali,[22] and the prophecy materialized in the massive Umayyad massacre that he conducted.[23] Abdullah, son of caliph ‘Umar II, was also borrowed to predict the killing of Marwãn II at the hands of ‘Ayn ibn ‘Ayn, interpreted by Abdullah ibn ‘Ali that it was he who will get this honor because both his name and his father's name begin with the letter ‘Ayn.[24] More interesting, Marwãn II was not to be excluded from this chain of traditions. In Abdullah ibn ‘Ali's hagiography, the last Umayyad caliph was reported to have predicted that the caliphate would be transformed to an offspring of al-‘Abbãs carrying the name of Abdullah. And while he was fighting his last battle with Abdullah ibn ‘Ali, he sent him a secret message confirming to him that the caliphate will be his, and accordingly he asked him to keep God in

(20) Ahmad ibn Wadih al-Ya‘qûbi, *Tãrîkh al- Ya‘qûbi* (History of Ya‘qûbi), 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar Beirut, 1980), II:365.

(21) For more details, see Ahmad ibn Muhammad al- Dhahabi, *Tãrîkh al-Islãm wa Wafayãt al-Mashãhîr wa al-A‘lãm* (History of Islam and the Deaths of the Famous and Imminent Personalities), 5 vols., ed. Umar Abd al-Salãm al-Tadmuri (Beirut: Dar al-Kitãb al-Arabi, 1988), vol. of AH 121-140: pp. 335, 338; al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 220-22.

(22) al-Khatîb, *Tãrîkh Baghdad*, X: 8-9.

(23) Cf. al-Ya‘qûbi, *Tãrîkh*, II: 356-357.

(24) ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas‘ûdi, *Murûj al-Dhahab wa Ma‘ãdin al-Jawhar* (Meadows of Gold and Mines of Pearls), 5th ed., 4 vol., ed. Muhammad Muhyi al-Dîn ‘Abd-al-Hamîd (np, nd), III: 274.

his heart whenever he will deal with his women.(25)

Nonetheless, the insurrection of Abdullah ibn ‘Ali came to its end when Abû Ja‘far persuaded Abû Muslim, the able military leader of the revolution against the Umayyads who was then governor of Khurasan, to deal militarily with the rebellious uncle. Abû Muslim invaded Syria, and could easily defeat Abdullah's partisans, after which the self-proclaimed caliph fled the battlefield to find asylum with his brother Sulaymãn, the then governor of Basra.(26)

It took several years after settling the affair of his uncle, that Abû Ja‘far turned to deal with his nephew ‘Isã ibn Mûsã to remove him from the line of succession, as was ordained by the late caliph al-Saffãh, and to have his son as heir to the throne. To this end, the caliph did not spare any effort in order to compel ‘Isã to cede his position in the hierarchy(27), until he succeeded in 146 AH / 763 AD to strike a deal with him by which Abu Ja‘far designated his son Muhammad (known as al-Mahdi) to be his heir apparent on condition that ‘Isã would come after him. In the same deal, ‘Isã was compensated generously for ceding his right. It is reported that he personally was granted ten million dirhams, while he secured one more million to be given evenly to three of his sons and one of his wives.(28)

No doubt, Abû Ja‘far could solve these three problems to his own benefit. He suppressed the ‘Alids' opposition, subdued the scholars' resentment and secured the caliphate to himself and to his own progeny apart from his ‘Abbãsid rivals. This, however, he could attain by resorting to violence and by using the state resources at his disposal that gave him the upper hand in effectively and vigorously tackling these challenges which he had to face from the very moment he assumed the office. Yet, violence was only a means to consolidate his status as an unrivalled supreme figure, but he was in need to something more than violence to justify his sovereignty as legitimate caliph and *imãm*. The caliphate has been the most sensitive and thorny issue all over the Islamic history around which countless theories have been devised, not one of them being similar to another. In such a case, Abû Ja‘far had to introduce his own theory on the issue that should give crucial answers to questions such as why the ‘Abbãsis had a sole right to the caliphate apart from the other branches of the House of the Prophet, why he himself alone deserved the office and not any one else, why the caliphate should be confined to his own progeny and what image of him should be presented to the public at large and the religious community in specific in order to be accepted as *imãm*. The theory was worked out gradually during his long tenure of office, and each chapter of it was a response to a specific development. Yet,

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(25) Ibid, p. 275.

(26) al-Dhahabi, *Tãrîkh al-Islãm*, vol. of AH 121-140: pp. 353-355.

(27) Examples of these efforts are reported by: al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 331; al-Ya‘qûbi, *Tãrîkh*, II, 379; ibn al-Athir, *al-Kãmil*, V: 577-581.

(28) Muhammad ibn ‘Abdus al-Jahshiyãri, *Kitãb al-Wuzarã’ wa al-Kuttãb* (Book of the Ministers and the Scribes), ed. Mustafa al-Saqqa et al. (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi, nd), pp.126-27; al-Tabari, IV: 295.

one can notice that the theory, when revised as a whole, was put together by a unique combination of three complementary themes: religion, or better say a devised type of religion, mythology including messianic ideas about himself and his house in general, and some Arab social customs, especially the ones that regulate the order of inheritance.

Religious Pretense

The first time Abû Ja‘far seemed determined to introduce a theory of his own making on his right to the caliphate was during his conflict with his rebel uncle ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Ali. The main features of this theory are contained in a text attributed to him on a revelatory dream he had beheld long before he became caliph, and told his relatives about it:

"I beheld a revelatory dream (ru’yã) as if I were in al-Masjid al-Harãm [the sacred mosque in Mecca] while the Messenger of God, peace and blessing of God be upon Him, was in Ka‘ba. The door was open and its step was erected. I missed none there; neither from the Qurayshites nor the Hãshimites. Suddenly, a herald called out, where is ‘Abdullah? My brother Abû al-‘Abbãs [also named ‘Abdullah] arose and overstepped the people until he reached to the step. There he was taken by hand and brought into the house [al-Ka‘ba]. After a while he came out with a standard four-arm long or more, and went outside the mosque. Again, the herald called out: Where is ‘Abdullah? I myself [his name is also ‘Abdullah] and ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Ali [his uncle] arose and raced to the step. There he sat, while I was taken by hand and brought into al-Ka‘ba. There the Messenger of God was; and sitting with him were Abû Bakr, ‘Umar [the first two Rãshidi caliphs] and Bilãl [the Prophet's herald for prayer]. He tied a standard for me, ordered me to take care of his community (umma), attired me with a turban and said: It is all for you, O Father of the Caliphs, down to the Doomsday".[29]

The following points were made clear in this text;

1- The first two ‘Abbãsid caliphs were in office because the caliphate was a grant from the Prophet – a prelude to the religious theory on the ‘Abbãsid caliphate (as shall be shown later) which claimed that the coming by the ‘Abbãsis to power was previously determined by the Prophet and textually stipulated by him.

2- All the other Hãshimites, and the Qurayshites at large, were excluded from any claim to the office; the ‘Abbãsis alone deserved the Prophet's favor.

3- Abû Ja‘far deserved the caliphate not because he was his brother's designate, but his coming to power was in fulfillment of the Prophet's will. Thus, though he was challenged by his uncle (they both raced to Ka‘ba), it was he whom the Prophet honored and not any other ‘Abbãsi. Moreover, it was he from all the ‘Abbãsis whose own line was destined to rule- the Prophet hailed him as Father of the Caliphs.

(29) Al-Khatîb, *Tãrîkh Baghdad*, I: 64-65.

This system of ideas, however, was put in a more sophisticated shape during the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and soon after. In that time, al-Mansûr had two concerns, firstly how to defend his and his family's sovereignty against the ‘Alids and the scholars who defied his authority, and secondly how to implement his resolution to impose his son al-Mahdi as his first heir apparent instead of his nephew ‘Isã ibn Mûsã. The main idea of this system was that the right to the ruling power in Islam was an exclusive one to the ‘Abbãsid family. Relying upon the commonplace idea on succeeding to the caliphate by inheritance, Abû Ja‘far went further to benefit much from the Islamic teachings on the preference given to the paternal uncles *vis-à-vis* the wives and daughters, so as to conclude that his great grandfather, ‘Abbãs, the paternal uncle of the Prophet, was more entitled to inherit him, thus to inherit his ruling powers, than his grandchildren through his daughter Fatima, wife of ‘Ali ibn Abi Tãlib. He rounded up this idea in a letter he sent to al-Nafs al-Zakiyya at the beginning of his revolt in response to a previous one sent by the latter to him boasting of his kinship to the Prophet. The main points Abû-Ja‘far has made in his letter were as follows:

"God has never equaled the women with the paternal uncles; He also never considered the fathers similar to the custodians and the agnates. He further deemed the paternal uncle as a father. [In this sense], He made his Prophet, peace and blessings of God be upon him, say [in the Quran] "I followed the religion of my fathers, Ibrãhîm, Ishãq and Ya‘qûb".

[…]

"You [al-Nafs al-Zakiyya] claimed that you are the son of the Messenger of God, but God denied that. He said [in Quran]: "Muhammad is not the father of any man of you; but he is the Messenger of God and the last one of the Prophets". You [the ‘Alids] are his daughter's children. Though this is a close kinship, yet she is a woman who is not entitled to neither possess the inheritance nor to lead the prayers. So, how would the imamate be inherited through her?"

[…]

"When the Prophet died none of his paternal uncles was alive except ‘Abbãs. He thus inherited him apart from all the children of ‘Abd al-Muttalib [‘Abbãs's father and the Prophet's grandfather]".

[…]

"We inherited, thus, the last one of the prophets, and accordingly we have monopolized the honor of the fathers".(30)

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(30) The full text of the letter in: Muhammad ibn Yazîd al-Mubarrid, *al-Kãmil fi al-Lugha wa al-Adab* (The Perfect [book] of Language and Literature), 2 vols., (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘arif, nd.), II: 385-88; Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd- Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-Farîd* (The Unique Necklace), 7vols., ed., Ahmad Amin et al. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitãb al-Lubnãni, 1983), V: 79-85.

The idea that Abû Ja‘far has adopted to justify transferring the Prophet's powers to him via ‘Abbãs was challenged by the fact that the latter was not the only paternal uncle of the Prophet to monopolize his inheritance. The same standards by which Abû Ja‘far claimed a right to the caliphate applied also to descendants of the other uncles of the Prophet. Such a formula was approached by a staunch Hãshimite opponent to the caliph in the name of Ishãq ibn al-Fadl, a descendent of the Prophet's uncle al-Hãrith ibn Abd Al-Muttalib, who used to preach the idea that the caliphate could be attained by any one from among the virtuous men of Banû Hãshim. According to his views that he used to express loudly, the imamate after the death of the Prophet suited none but Banû Hãshim, especially the oldest one who should assume it.(31)

Abû Ja‘far eyed these ideas seriously. He managed to silence Ishãq by imprisonment that lasted until he was freed by caliph al-Mahdi. Moreover, it seems that these views alerted Abû Ja‘far to the defects in his system of ideas that focused on ‘Abbãs's right to inherit the Prophet only because of their blood ties. The defects could depend amended when resting the whole theory of legitimacy on stronger doctrinal bases, replacing that system of ideas by a system of beliefs that could depend on religion in a community that was still under the influence of strong religiosity.

The main topic of this system was the belief in the religious sacredness of the ‘Abbãsid caliphate. To this effect, a host of sayings (*Ahãdîth*, sing. *Hadîth*) attributed to the Prophet were invented, whose contents and purposes transpire that they were the product of this period.(32) A main innovation in this system was that ‘Abbãs deserved the inheritance of the Prophet not only because he was his uncle, but also more significantly because he occupied a distinctively religious status in Islam – he had a share in the prophethood. In this respect, the Prophet was reported to have said to ‘Abbãs, "The prophethood and the kingship are [placed] into you" (in another wording, the term caliphate was used instead of kingship).(33) In another example, one can distinguish between two functions in Islam: The prophethood; which was the province of the Messenger of God, and the caliphate; which complemented the prophethood and was reserved to ‘Abbãs and his progeny. The saying reads:

" ‘Abbãs once said, "O Messenger of God! What is ours in this affair [Islam]? He said: "The prophethood is mine and the caliphate is yours. It is by you that this affair was inaugurated, and

(31) Al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 404.

(32) Some of these sayings were related by al-Mansûr himself through a chain of transmitters ending in the Prophet, cf: al-Suyûti, *Tãrîkh al-Khulafã'*, p. 16; others were transmitted by contemporary ‘Abbasis, see: al-Khatîb, *Tãrîkh Baghdad*, XIV: 545; and more by senior officials in the administration of al-Mansûr, Ibid, XIII: 132.

(33) ‘Ali ibn al-Hasan ibn ‘Asakir, *Tãhdhîb Tarîkh Dimashq al-Kabîr* (A Rectification of the Enlarged History of Damascus),7 vols., ed. Abd al-Qadir Badrãn (Beirut: Dar al-Masîra, 1979), VII: 246.

it is by you that it should be concluded' ".[34]

The special status in Islam, which was given to ‘Abbãs, was applied also to his progeny until Doomsday. The Prophet was reported to have said to ‘Abbãs, "*God has initiated Islam by me. He will seal it with one of your offspring who will lead ‘Isã [Jesus- believed to insurrect shortly before the Day of Judgment] in his prayers*".[35]

It needs no mentioning that ‘Abbãs did not assume the caliphate after the death of the Prophet. He lived after him to die in the reign of ‘Uthmãn witnessing thus three caliphs (Abû Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmãn) ascending to the office leaving him behind. This was a serious gap that if not bridged should spoil the theory which predicted to him and his offspring a mission in Islam to complement the prophethood. His son ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbãs was borrowed here to remedy the weakness and to justify why ‘Abbãs and his scions were passed over. This was reached through several lengthy debates between ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbãs and caliph Mu‘ãwiya designed to make the former appear as a principled defender of his family's right to the caliphate, but with full understanding of the reasons that prevented the family from assuming the office. That was because the people had strayed from the right path, and due to the prophetical wisdom that resolved that the family should refrain from seeking the caliphate in that specific period. In one of these debates, Mu‘ãwiya was reported to have said to ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbãs,

> *"…I don't see that the kinship [to the Prophet] has ever constituted a right [to the caliphate], nor it established a kingship. If it were [attained] only via kinship regardless of the consensus and the acceptance [by the community], why then ‘Abbãs, though he was the Prophet's uncle and inheritor… had refrained from seeking it?"*

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbãs replied,

"When the people refrained from accepting us and agreeing upon us, they were deviating from the right path, and they were also deprived from their good luck… What has stopped us from seeking this affair after the Messenger of God was an order from the Messenger of God that we accepted and believed in its interpretation. Had we been determined to get it, in the way that he prohibited us to follow, then we could have got it, or otherwise we should have been excused. Therefore, we did nothing more than relieving the people from adhering to our right when they had abandoned us. Thus, one should not be blamed for ceding one's right".[36]

This explanation, however, applied only to the time of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbãs, but the future was different. In his alleged debates with Mu‘ãwiya, the right of the ‘Abbãsis to the caliphate was a matter

(34) Ibid., 247.
(35) Loc. cit.
(36) *Akhbãr al-Dawla,* pp. 74-76. See also pp. 51-52 for other debates on the same subject.

of faith that could not be denied and shall materialize one day. In words attributed to him addressing Mu‘ãwiya, he said,

"We do testify that the kingship is ours, and so is the mahdi who will fill the earth with justice. For each day they [the Umayyads] will reign, we will reign two; for each month, we will reign two; and for each year, we will reign two years… Our reign is one of mercy".(37)

The attaining by the ‘Abbãsis of the caliphate was thus imperative. Besides, it was made part of the religion since it was allegedly determined by the Prophet himself in many sayings attributed to him, mostly with chains of transmitters at the top of which stood ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbãs as hearing the sayings immediately from the lips of the Prophet. These sayings focused on the first two caliphs, i.e. al-Saffãh and al-Mansûr, and the latter's heir apparent al- Mahdi (distinguished thus by their epithets) as destined to lead the Islamic community and to hold the caliphate.(38)

In such ideational framework that Abû Ja‘far has developed to defend his legitimacy, no place, whatsoever, should be expected to have been reserved to the ‘Alids - the other branch of the House of the Prophet. ‘Ali ibn Abi Tãlib, instead, was involved as a witness to rectify the ‘Abbãsid theory. In one report, he was quoted as calling ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbãs as "Father of the Kings" *(Abû al-amlãk)*(39). More significantly, the ‘Alids, in the religion such designed by Abû Ja‘far, were textually excluded by the Prophet from the right to the caliphate and were ordered not to hinder the God's will in bringing the ‘Abbãsis to the office. A lengthy report, the content of which affirms that it was produced during the armed conflict between al-Mansûr and al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, tells about a quarrel between ‘Abbãs and ‘Ali in the presence of the Prophet that made the Prophet grow angry. He consequently rebuffed ‘Ali saying,

"... Do you know with whom you have just been tough? He is my father, my uncle, the one who will remain after me, my origin, the rest of my fathers, the best of the people of Jãhiliyya [Pre-Islamic times] in his origin and the best after me of the people of Islam in his person and his religion. Have you not known that God is to bring out from the progeny of my uncle ‘Abbãs the sons whom He will make patrons, caliphs and kings and among them is the mahdi of my nation. O ‘Ali! It was not I who mentioned them but it was God who mentioned them and made their sounds high ... In their midst He will create the bright light, the good servant, the sovereign mahdi. He will revive him at the heels of a severe dispute so as to revive with him His Book and my sunna ... That would come after a strife in which some of your children, O ‘Ali!, would emerge to corrupt

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(37) Ibid, p. 52.

(38) For examples of such sayings, see: al-Suyûti, *Tãrîkh al-Khulafã'*, 16; al-Khatîb, *Tãrîkh Baghdad*, I: 62-64, XIV: 435; Ibn ‘Asakir, *Tãrîkh Dimashq*, VII: 245.

(39) Ibn Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd*, V: 103.

the towns, to pose as their enemies, and to tell lies [in the intent of] spoiling their affairs. That would last for months or for a year until God would again bestow his grace upon the children of ‘Abbãs that will continue to be theirs until the coming of al-mahdi from among them ... 0 ‘Ali! Protect his [‘Abbãs's] progeny and children since God is their protector. They will take over the affairs of my nation and God will reinforce Islam by them..."[40]

Moreover, the doctrine on *al-ridã min Ã1 Muhammad* has totally lost its value in this theory. It has never occurred in al-Mansûr's discourse to advocate his legitimacy. He surely was no longer in need for such a doctrine to justify his and his family's sovereignty. *Al-ridã* denoted in some respects that the community had the right to choose to the imamate the one from the Prophet's family who was found qualified to assume the office and could thus earn its acceptance. This principle was in discrepancy with Abû Ja‘far's theory on the caliphate in which the caliph deserved the office because he enjoyed a recognizable status in Islam predetermined by the Prophet and also because of his being a vehicle for fulfilling God's will in bringing to the leadership of Islam a divinely designated person from the line of ‘Abbãs.

The legitimacy of the ‘Abbãsis was thus a matter that could not be left to the discretion of the people; it was rather a religionized axiom pertaining to the realm of faith. This contributed much to the principle of the divine right to rule that the ‘Abbãsis adopted. What is meant by this principle here is that the caliph was commissioned by God to run the Muslims' affairs and to rule on His behalf in order to execute His will. In fact, the ‘Abbãsis were not the first who styled the caliph in this guise. Before them, the Umayyad caliphs accepted the title *Khalîfat Allãh* (God's caliph)[41] and all its variations to suggest that they deputized God and were ruling in His name. The Abbãsis did not deviate from this tradition. The title *Khalîfat Allãh* is attested for al-Saffãh in a comment he inscribed on a letter he had received from Abû Muslim requesting permission to perform the duty of pilgrimage, as he said that he will not prevent him from visiting the House of God or His caliph (*bayt Allãh al-harãm aw khalîfatih).*[42] The same applies to al-Mansûr who described himself as *Khalîfat Allãh* in the safety document that he issued to his uncle ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Ali after his surrender.[43] The two

(40)The full text in Ibn ‘Asakir, *Tãrîkh Dimashq*, VII: 245-246.

(41) For a lengthy consideration of the title *Khalîfat Allãh* during the Umayyad period, see: Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4-12. ‘Abd-al-Rahmãn ibn Khaldûn, *al-Muqaddima* (the Prolegomenon), (Beirut: Dar al-Kitãb al-Lubnãni, 1982), p. 339, states, however, that the majority of the Muslim scholars rejected the title *Khalîfat Allãh,* and confirmed *Khalîfat Rasûl Allãh,* in the understanding that *Khalîfa* stands for successor.

(42) Ibn Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd,* IV: 211.

(43)‘Abdullah ibn ‘Ali al-Azdi, *Tãrîkh al-Mawsil* (History of Mawsil), ed. A. Habiba (Cairo, 1967), p.168;

caliphs were further flattered by their court poets by exalting the head of state to this status of *Khalîfat Allãh* or *Khalîfat al-Rahmãn.*[(44)] Al-Mansûr rounded up this principle of rule in which the caliph was deputed by God to run the subjects' affairs, saying,

> *"I am the absolute power of God on His earth (sultãn Allãh fi ardih).I govern you [people] by His approval and guidance. I am the bursar of His proceeds (fay') which I divide by His will and give upon His permission"*.[(45)]

Being so, al-Mansûr wanted his commands to be religion and his exercise of power to be immune against any criticism by the ruled that had no authority to control his behavior as long as God inspired it. When he was once preaching at a mosque, an unknown worshipper dared to urge him to keep God in his mind. To this, he replied "O People! Don't do it again because wisdom has been revealed to us and from us it was borrowed."[(46)]

The image, thus, that al-Mansûr was keen to present to the scholars who defied his legitimacy on religious grounds, and to his subjects at large, who were demanded to yield to his unquestionable powers, that he was a divinely guided *imãm* whose rule was rooted deep in the religion. This has been one of his concerns since his early days in office. A report to this effect tells that a short time after he had succeeded to the throne, and while he was in Medina, he summoned Mãlik ibn Anas, together with the Medinese judge ibn Sam'ãn and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Rahmãn ibn Abi Dhi'b who was recognized by his contemporaries as the jurisprudent (*faqîh*) of Medina, and asked them to testify that he was an *imãm* of justice.[(47)] In another example, after he had murdered Abû Muslim, he delivered a speech in which he spoke of himself as the *imãm* who took the initiative to glorify the religion.[(48)]

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quoted in: Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 13.

(44) For many examples, see: Farûq 'Umar, *Buhûth fi al-Tãrîkh al-Abbãsi* (Essays in the 'Abbasid History), p. 231; Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 13.

(45) al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 371.

(46) ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd*, I: 53.

(47) Abdullah ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba, *al-Imãma wa al-Siyãsa* (The Imamate and Statesmanship), 2 vols., ed. Taha al-Zayni (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, nd), II: 144-45. The report tells that the caliph asked the three scholars directly, "What kind of man am I in your eyes? Am I an imãm of justice or an imãm of oppression?" To his dismay, he did not get a unified response. Mãlik refrained to answer begging the caliph to absolve him from speaking. Ibn Sam'ãn rushed to applaud him saying, "You perform the duty of pilgrimage, struggle against the enemies, make the roads safe, protect the weak against the mighty, and it is by you that the religion is upheld. You are thus the best of the men and the most just among the imãms". Ibn Abi Dhi'b's answer was very different: "You are the most evil man. You have arrogated to yourself the money of God and of his Messenger and the share of it that is [set aside] to the [Prophet's] relatives, the orphan and the poor. You have mortified the weak, exhausted the mighty and held their riches".

(48) al-Mas'ûdi, *Murûj*, III: 305.

Mythical Components

Mythology was not less important than these conceptions that took the guise of religion to consolidate the ‘Abbãsis' legitimacy to be caliphs, and in particular of al-Mansûr. This could be detected in the myths about the mahdism that this caliph had developed in a sophisticated way. In fact, mahdism (prophecies of messianic expectations) was not the invention of the ‘Abbãsis. It rather developed throughout the Umayyad period and was adopted by various pretenders, or was predicated to them by their followers who were lusting for support to their cause, supposedly better acquired by presenting these pretenders in the guise of the long awaited and divinely guided saviors who will destroy tyranny and establish justice.(49) In addition, some sources tell that Muhammad ibn ‘Ali was addressed by some of his partisans as the one who is ordained by God to revive justice and to mortify oppression(50) - the same mission attributed to any *mahdi*, albeit he never was known as carrying the title. It is also mentioned that al-Saffãh was named *mahdi*(51), though it seems certain that attaching the word *mahdi* to his name was an honorific mode of address used by some zealot supporters or by some of the court poets(52) rather than acquired officially by the caliph himself as regnal title. This idea could be supported by the fact that al-Saffãh was also described as *al-qã’m*, *al-muhtadi* and *al-murtada*(53), besides *al-mahdi*. The same could be said about Abû Ja‘far who was once praised by a poet as *mahdi*(54), though he never was known as carrying the epithet officially.

Nevertheless, it was Abû Ja‘far himself who was the first in the dynasty who manipulated the mahdism for certain purposes, i.e. to be part of his (and his family's) type of legitimacy. By using the notion, he proposed to portray his being in power as a prophetical act, the belief in which was to constitute a part of the Muslim's general belief in the Prophet's teachings. The caliph in this faith was a manifestation of a prophecy by the Messenger of God never to be protested nor checked. He officially

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(49) For various types of mahdis, see: ‘Umar, *Buhûth*, p. 205-206. For a methodological criticism of many of the sayings attributed to the Prophet relating to mahdism, see: ibn Khaldûn, *al-Muqaddima*, p. 555-574.

(50) Abd al-‘Azîz al-Dûri, *al-‘Asr al-‘Abbãsi al-Awwal: Dirãsa fi al-Tãrîkh al-Siyãsi wa al-Idãri wa al-Mãli* (The First Abbasid Period: A Study in the Political, Administrative and Financial History), 3rd impression (Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘a, 1997), p. 32.

(51) ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas‘ûdi, *al-Tanbîh wa al-Ishrãf* (Notification and Supervision), (Beirut: Maktabat al-Istiqlãl, 1981), p. 308.

(52) The poet Sadîf praised al-Saffãh as "the Hashimite mahdi whom the people were waiting for after their desperation", al-Ya‘qûbi, *Tãrîkh*, II, 359.

(53) Abu al-Husein Hilãl ibn al-Muhassin al-Sãbi’, *Rusûm Dãr al-Khilãfa*, ed. Mikha’il ‘Awãd, 2nd impression (Beirut: Dar al-Raed al-‘Arabi, 1986), p. 129. The three words could denote the following meanings: *al-qã’im* – the one who shoulders the responsibility of the cause or of his nation; *al-muhtadi* – the one who is following the right path of faith; *al-murtada* – the one who God is pleased with.

(54) Umar, *Buhûth*, p. 212.

bore the title al-Mansûr which, however, was not intended only to mean "the one destined to win", but also to revive various legendary traditions on the long awaited, believed-to-be savior carrying the name of *Mansûr* who will restore justice and security to the people amidst whom he will appear. The title had deep historic roots in pre-Islamic times, particularly in Yemen where many legends revolved around the coming of a *mansûr* who will restore its vanished glory and establish justice.(55) In Islam, the Prophet appealed to the same word of *mansûr* to be his war slogan in the battle of Badr in the second Hijri year (624 AD).(56) Furthermore, many rebels adopted the legend of *mansûr* as a means to strengthen the morale of their followers and to imbue their revolts with a messianic color. To this effect, al-Mukhtãr used the word as a key slogan and watchword for his revolt in Kûfa in 66 AH (685 AD).(57) The word was also a title of ‘Abd al-Rahmãn ibn al-Ash‘ath who revolted (81 AH / 700 AD) against al-Hajjaj, the governor of Iraq for the Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwãn.(58) The same legend seems also to have been used by al-Hãrith ibn Surayj who revolted twice in the eastern provinces in 115 AH / 733 AD and 147 AH / 745 AD.(59) In addition to that, the ‘Abbãsid revolution had *al-mansûr* as one of its mottoes.(60)

This messianic nature of the title was given the power of religion by the ‘Abbãsid propaganda machine, in the process of forging sayings ascribed to the Prophet. A number of these were produced to foretell the coming of a *mansûr* stemming from the family of the Prophet "whose banners are never to be defeated".(61) ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbãs was also borrowed to foretell the coming of al-Mansûr from his own progeny "who will be endowed with power to overcome his enemies as half as the power of the Prophet, and to frighten them from a month-marching distance, also half the distance provided for the Prophet to frighten his enemies".(62) Apart thus from its lexical meaning, the title which Abû Ja‘far adopted reveals much of the content of his example of rule. The caliph was destined to be triumphant,

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(55) *Ibid*, pp. 207-208 and his sources there.

(56) Muhammad ibn ‘Umar al-Waqidi, *Kitãb al-Maghãzi*, (Book of the Invasions), 3 vols., ed. Marsden Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966, Photostat copy: Beirut: ‘Alam al-Kutub, 3rd edition, 1984), I: 8.

(57) Al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, III: 322, 334. al-Mukhtãr revolted in the reign of ʿAbd Malik ibn Marwãn to avenge the killers of al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib who was killed in Karbalã' in the reign of caliph Yazîd ibn Muʿãwiya I. Some reports tell that he took as *imãm* Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, known as Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya. The revolt was suppressed by the partisans of ‘Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr who had proclaimed himself caliph in Hijãz and could spread his sovereignty over Iraq, including Kûfa, the home of al-Mukhtãr's revolt.

(58) Umar, *Buhûth*. P. 208.

(59) ibn Khaldûn, *Muqaddima*, p. 557.

(60) al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 186.

(61) al-Suyûti, *Tãrîkh al-Khulafã‘*, p. 260.

(62) ibn Khaldûn, *Muqaddima*, p. 571

while every effort to challenge his legitimacy will be futile since his banners were prophetically designed not to be defeated.

It seems certain that Abû Ja‘far adopted the epithet al-Mansûr as a regnal title after he had come out victorious from his struggle with Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya who himself was called *mahdi*. It was in this period that he chose for his son and heir apparent the title al-Mahdi, and in the process, it seems that the two titles of al-Mansûr and al-Mahdi were designed together, and along with them, the many sayings on their emergence from the House of ‘Abbãs were put in the mouth of the Prophet. Abû Ja‘far's choice of the title *mahdi* for his son sheds, however, more lights on this relation between mahdism and his pattern of rule. Several sayings were ascribed to the Prophet predicting the coming of this specific *mahdi* identified by his name (Muhammad, the heir apparent's name) and his father's name (‘Abdullah, al- Mansûr's first name), and textually stating that he should be a descendant of ‘Abbãs.(63) In this sense, al-Mahdi was a visible expression of the God's will to bring to the leadership of the Islamic community a man whose identity had been determined in eternity, thus unconditional obedience to him by the Muslims was part of their submission to this eternal will. al-Mansûr stated explicitly this relation between mahdism as he designed and his concepts of domination, as said on this *mahdi*:

> *"... Similar to what God had done to us at the commence of our cause, He cast his [al-Mahdi's] love into the hearts of the defendants of religion and distributed his amity in their hearts. They thus began to mention only his merits, hail only his name and know no right but his. Comprehending their love to him and their identifying him by his marks and name and calling on the populace to pay him their obedience, the Prince of the Faithful became absolutely convinced that such an affair was of God and of his own making. The populace did not interfere in it nor had the ability to do it. It was neither of their arrangement nor due to their consultation."*(64)

Besides mahdism that Abû Ja‘far had employed to present himself in the image of the divinely guided imãm, he portrayed himself as the one whose practices and acts were in line with an eternal, godly will that he alone was acquainted with. This was the core of the legendary traditions about *al-‘ilm al-qadîm* (the eternally old omniscience) that he possessed. In fact, traditions about this sort of mythical, super human knowledge did exist in different stages of the Islamic history. The Shi‘ites claimed that they possessed such an ‘*ilm* on their own imãms that they alleged to have been dictated by Ja‘far al-Sãdiq their sixth imãm (died 148 AH / 765 AD) and was written down on calfskin, known

(63) See: al-Khatîb, *Tãrîkh Baghdad*, V: 391; al- Suyûti, *Tãrîkh al-Khulafã‘*, p.260, 272.

(64) This was part of a message al-Mansûr wrote to his nephew ‘Isã ibn Mûsã urging him to abdicate to al-Mahdi, his heir apparent designate; Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 333-335.

as *al-Jafr*.[65] The same Ja'far was the centre of another claim telling that he had in his possession a scripture attributed to Fãtima, daughter of the Prophet and wife of 'Ali ibn abi Tãlib, known as *Mushaf Fãtima*, which was revealed to her after the death of the Prophet. This *Mushaf*, it was said, contained endless information about every thing in this world and the world beyond, whether in the past or in the future.[66] One cannot be sure if Ja'far al-Sãdiq was really responsible for the allegations about these two scriptures containing this sacred *'ilm* or they were only the invention of later Shi'ite writers. Yet, it is noteworthy that the Shi'ite sects agree unanimously on that the sources of the authorities of the imãm is the *'ilm*, that is, it is supposed that the imãm should be acquainted with a Godly *'ilm*, whether he acquired it through revelation, inspiration or inheritance, in order to be able to solve the problems of the Islamic community[67]. A similar *'ilm* was used also by the 'Abbãsid partisans who used to circulate during their revolution in Khurasan against the Umayyads that they possessed a certain old *'ilm* which they employed as a means to consolidate one of their allegations that the imamate has been transferred from the 'Alids to the 'Abbãsis, and in the same time to surround the latter with a legendary and eschatological atmosphere belonging to this old *'ilm*. That was clear in the legend of *al-sahîfa al-safrã'* (the yellow scroll) that was said to have been originally in the possession of 'Ali ibn Abi Tãlib in which was recorded an eternally old knowledge that predicted the emergence of the black banners (of the 'Abbãsid partisans) from Khurasan and how they would emerge there. It also identified the men who would raise these banners and the tribes who would come to extend support. The legend went further to tell that after the death of 'Ali it happened that his son Muhammad (known as ibn al-Hanafiyya, after his mother who was from Banû Hanîfa clan) asked his two brothers al-Hasan and al-Husayn to give him a share of their father's inheritance. Accordingly, al-Hasan asked al-Husayn to give Muhammad a part of the father's knowledge (*'ilm*) and that was *al-sahîfa al-safrã'*. On his death, Muhammad passed the scroll to his son Abû Hãshim who kept it in his possession until he handed it on to Muhammad ibn 'Ali.[68]

Al-Mansûr followed suit. He made known to the public that he had inherited from his ancestors an eternally old knowledge (*'ilm qadîm)* recorded in books and preserved in a safe *(safat)* which tells of

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(65) ibn Khaldûn, *Muqaddima*, 594.

(66) Ali ibn Muhammad al-Faqihi, in his introduction to: Abu Na'im al-Asbahãni, *Kitãb al-Imãma* (Book of the Imamate), edited by Ali Muhammad al-Faqihi (al-Madina al-Munawwara: Maktabat al-'Ulum wal-Hikam, 1987), pp. 130-132, quoting: al-Kulayni, *al-Kãfi* (Tehran: al-Matba'a al-Islamiyya, 1388 AH), Vol. I: 185-186; and Muhammad ibn Jarîr al-Tabarsi, *Dalã'il al-Imãma* (al-Najaf: al-Matba'a al-Haydariyya, 1383 AH), p. 27.

(67) Muhammad 'Abd al-Hayy Sha'ban, *al-Thawra al-'Abbãsiyya* (the Abbasid Revolution), trans. Abd al-Majîd al-Qaysi (Dar al-Dirasãt al-Khalîjiyya, nd.), p. 225.

(68) *Akhbãr al-Dawla*, pp.184-185.

all that happened in the past and of all that will happen in the future down to Doomsday.(69) In view of that, his legitimacy as caliph could never be prejudiced because it was predetermined by this omniscience in time immemorial. Moreover, this legendary *'ilm* qualified him alone to know what was right and just, and accordingly protected him against errors. He in this sense wanted to be deemed infallible.

Epilogue

As has been shown above, not a few scholars challenged al-Mansûr's authority and refrained from accepting him as a legitimate ruler. Others, including 'Alids and rebels from various backgrounds went further to revolt against him contesting his very existence in the seat of caliph. Nonetheless, it could hardly be ruled out that his discourse about the sacredness of the caliph and the caliphal institution did survive in the Islamic political culture. To be sure, various determinants have contributed a lot to present the caliphate in an aura of sanctity, whether these were political, dynastical, psychological or sectarian. Yet, one cannot ignore the influence of al-Mansûr's ideas in modeling many of the concepts about the caliphate that evolved in the future. A few examples may clarify such a judgment. Al-Mansûr's opinion of himself as being a caliph according to a heavenly will repeated itself in what Abû Yûsuf, the Hanifite scholar (*faqîh*) and the chief judge (*qãdi al-qudãt*) under the fifth 'Abbãsid caliph, Hãrûn al-Rashîd, has written about the caliphate. In his eyes, it was God who invested Hãrûn with the office of caliph, and it was He who entrusted him with taking care of his community.(70) In this sense, as Abû Yûsuf has thought, God has instituted those charged with authority (*wulãt al-amr*) as deputies on His earth and has provided them with a light to illuminate for the subjects those of their affairs which are obscure to them and to clarify those duties about which they are in doubt.(71) Albeit Abû Yûsuf has never referred to al-Mansûr as a source of his ideas, one cannot rule out that these were a product of a culture that has been flourishing since Abû Ja'far had introduced his theory on the caliphate.

Besides, many of al-Mansûr's ideas had strong echoes in the mind of al-Ma'mûn, the seventh 'Abbãsid caliph, and his views on the caliphate and on him personally as holding the office. In his concept, God has deemed it obligatory that the paternal relatives of the Prophet (*'asaba*) should inherit him, and has ordained that this right to inheritance be inevitable.(72)

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(69) al-Tabari, *Tãrîkh al-Rusul*, IV: 378.

(70) Abû Yûsuf Ya'qûb ibn Ibrahîm, *Kitãb al-Kharãj* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, nd.), p.3.

(71) Ibid, p. 5.

(72) Part of an address the caliph has sent to Khurasan to be read to his partisans there; Ahmad Zaki Safwat (editor), *Jamharat Rasa'il al-'Arab* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Ilmiyya, nd.), Vol. III: 322.

Moreover, al-Ma'mûn himself deputized God on His earth.(73) He also repeated what Abû Ja'far had said about his eternally old knowledge (*al-'ilm al-qadîm*) claiming that God has provided the imams and the caliphs, of whom he was one, with such an *'ilm*.(74)

al-Mãwardi (d. 450/ 1058) reflected as well the same ideas of al-Mansûr about the divine will which was behind the caliph's assuming of the seat of caliphate, and the caliph was in this capacity the inheritor of the Prophet. In his words, God has assigned (*nadaba*) a leader to the community to be successor to the Prophethood.(75) Again, as was the above - said example of Abû Yûsuf, al-Mãwardi has never referred to al-Mansûr as a source of his ideas. Yet, one can recall here what Gibb has said about the circumstances in which al- Mãwardi had authored his book. It was when the supremacy of the Buwayhids was fading, which flourished the hopes of the two 'Abbasid caliphs al-Qãdir (d. 422 AH/ 1031 AD) and his successor al-Qã'im to restore the actual 'Abbasid sovereignty. Meanwhile, al-Mãwardi was a close associate of the two caliphs occupying the high office of *qãdi al-quda* (the supreme judge) and their envoy to their negotiation with the Buwayhids princes. Against this background, he authored his book at the request of one of these two caliphs[76]. This would lead to a very possible conclusion that in presenting the caliph in such a sacred guise, al-Mãwardi intended to revive the old theory on the divine nature of the 'Abbasid caliphate initiated by al-Mansûr in the aim of supporting the position of his caliph *vis-à-vis* his Buwayhid adversities.

To wrap up, al-Mansûr's role in developing the concept of the sacredness of the caliphal institution was not marginal. In many respects, he seemed to be the most important composer of its blueprint.

(73) In a letter al-Ma'mûn has sent to al-Hasan ibn Sahl, one of his senior aids; Ibid, p. 357.

(74) Part of a letter al-Ma'mûn sent from al-Riqqa to his deputy in Baghdad Ishaq ibn Ibrahim asking him to examine the scholars there about the question known as "the creation of Quran"; Ibid, p. 454.

(75)'Ali ibn Habîb al-Mawardi, *al-Ahkãm al-Sultãniyyah wa al-Wilãyãt al-Dîniyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1985), p. 3.

(76) Hamilton Gibb, *Dirãsãt fi Hadãrat al- Islãm* (Studies on the Civilization of Islam), trans. Ihsãn Abbãs, Muhammad Yûsuf Nijm and Mahmûd Zãyid, 3rd impression (Beirut: Dar al-Ilm Llilmalãyîn, 1979), pp. 200-201.

قدسية الخلافة

أصول المسألة عند أبي جعفر المنصور

عصام سخنيني *

ملخـص

كان الخليفة العباسي الثاني أبو جعفر المنصور أول من صاغ منظومة فكرية متكاملة حول القدسية التي ينبغي إسباغها على مؤسسة الخلافة وعلى الخليفة نفسه. فبخلاف ما كان عليه سابقوه من الخلفاء، سواء أكانوا من الراشدين أم من الأمويين، الذين لم ينظر إلى خلافتهم على أنها شأن من صنع الله تعالى، أراد أبو جعفر أن يجعل خلافته جزءا من المعتقد الديني، كما شاء أن يحيط نفسه من حيث هو خليفة بهالة من القداسة. وفي هذا السياق، دمج في منظومته الفكرية عددا من العناصر المختلفة لم تجتمع قط على صعيد واحد كذلك الذي صنعه. فقد جمع في كل واحد ادعاءات دينية وتصورات ذات طبيعة أسطورية وتقاليد وعادات عربية موروثة، وجعل منها الحاضنة التي ترعرعت فيها منظومته الفكرية عن الخلافة. وعلى الرغم من أن القصد الرئيسي من هذه المنظومة كان يندرج في مسعاه لتعزيز شرعيته في الحكم في مواجهة خصومه من مختلف الاتجاهات، إلا أنها تغلغلت كذلك في بعض معطيات الفكر السياسي الإسلامي الذي لم تخلُ منه معالجات لشأن مؤسسة الخلافة كانت تصاغ بمصطلحات مستوحاة من الدين وكانت في صورة ما صدى لأفكار أبي جعفر.

الكلمات الدالة: الخلافة، أبو جعفر المنصور، قدسية، الخلافة العباسية.

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